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III.—PRINCIPLES OF ORTHOGRAPHY OF FRENCH VERBS ENDING IN *-ELER* AND *-ETER*.

M. B. Jullien in his 'Revue de l'Instruction Publique' (Didot, Orthographe Française, p. 380) makes this remark: "I should like to find a list of verbs in *-eler* and *-eter*. I do not exactly know how many of them our language possesses, but if there were from two to three hundred I should not be surprised. These verbs present this peculiarity, that wherever the last syllable is mute the *e* preceding it *must* become open. This open *e* is marked either by a grave accent, as in *geler*, *je gèle*, *acheter*, *j'achète*; or by doubling the intermediary consonant, as in *appeler*, *j'appelle*, *jeter*, *je jette*; and every one knows how difficult it is to remember without any determining reason the choice which one must make between these two orthographies. But this is not all; for a great number of these verbs the Academy does not give any example where the last *e* is mute, so that the writer is free to choose between the two methods, and the critic is left free to condemn him, no matter which course he has taken."

The want thus complained of by M. Jullien I have endeavored to supply by making a list of these verbs in *-eler* and *-eter*, and in order to put an end to the very unsatisfactory state of incertitude as regards this question which his last words so forcibly illustrate, I have tried to find out if any principle had governed the choice of either orthography, and if so, what it was.

The number of verbs I have found, is 224: 129 ending in *-eter* and 95 in *-eler*, of which I will give a list further on. Of these the Academy only gives the conjugation in 108 cases; hence there are 116 verbs left to the option of writers. M. Littré, however, who, I think, can be taken as a very safe authority, in his 'Dictionnaire de la langue Française,' gives the conjugation of 94 of these 116 verbs, thus reducing to 22 the number of those left to our own choice.

These 202 verbs can be divided, according to the orthography observed in their conjugation, into five classes, as follows:

I. Those verbs in *-eler* and *-eter* which double the *l* or *t* before mute *e*, as *appeler*, *j'appelle*, *jeter*, *je jette*, *etc.*

This class numbers 105 verbs (57 in *-eter* and 48 in *-eler*), more than half the verbs conjugated. They are—

arbrêter	interjeter	appeler	étinceler
billetter	jeter	amonceler	ficeler
biqueter	lingueter	anneler	gabeler
briqueter	loqueter	atteler	grabeler
brocheter	louveter	bosseler	greneler
cacheter	maillêter	carner	grommeler
caillêter	marqueter	chanceler	grumeler
cliqueter	moucheter	chapeler	javeler
coqueter	mugueter	cordeler	jumeler
coupleter	naqueter	crêneler	morceler
débonneter	paqueter	cuveler	museler
déboqueter	parqueter	décapeler	niveler
décacheter	pinceter	décheveler	oiseler
déchiqueter	piqueter	démuseler	paisseler
déjeter	pocheter	denteler	panteler
démoucheter	projeter	déniveler	pommeler
écolleter	recacher	dépuceler	rappeler
émoucheter	rejeter	dessemeler	râtelier
empaqueter	saveter	dételer	renouveler
épinceter	souffleter	écheler	ressemeler
feuilleter	surjeter	écheveler	ruisseler
forjeter	tacheter	enficeler	taveler
fureter	teter	enjaveler	tonneler
gileter	tréjeter	ensorceler	
gobeter	valeter	épeler	
greneter	vergeter		
guériter	vigneter		
guillemeter	voleter		
haleter			

II. Verbs of this species which take a grave accent on the *e* which precedes the mute syllable, as *celer*, *je cèle*, *acheter*, *j'achète*.

This class has only 31 verbs, not one-third of the previous class and scarcely a seventh of the whole number. They are as follows :

acheter	fileter	agneler	encasteler
becqueter	jarreter	bourreler	engeler
claqueter	râcheter	carner	geler
colleter		celer	griveler
craqueter		congeler	harceler
crocheter		déceler	marteler
décolleter		dégeler	modeler
étiqueter		démanteler	peler
		écarteler	régeler
		embreler	répeler

III. Verbs which are common, *i. e.* can be conjugated either by doubling the consonant *l* or *t* before mute *e*, or with a single consonant and a grave accent on the preceding *e*, as *breveter*, which, according to Littré, can be written *je brevette* or *je brevète*. We find 12 verbs belonging to this class—9 in *-eter* and 3 in *-eler*. They are:

aiguilleter	buffeter	trompeter	botteler
banqueter	caqueter		canneler
bonneter	dépaqueter		ciseler
breveter	épousseter		

IV. Verbs which have already an acute accent on the penult in the infinitive which they change to a grave accent in the present before mute *e*, but are regular in all their other tenses. This class numbers 29 verbs, which are:

affréter	empiéter	péter	anhéler
appéter	fréter	piéter	héler
admonéter	genéter	refléter	recéler
compéter	hébéter	rempiéter	révéler
compléter	inquiéter	répéter	shacéler
concréter	interpréter	secréter	
décompléter	masséter	sousfréter	
décréter	mésinterpréter	végéter	

V. Verbs which have a circumflex accent on the penult in the infinitive. They are regular in all their moods and tenses, and number 25, as follows:

acquêter	entêter	bêler	prêler
apprêter	fêter	demêler	vêler
arrêter	prêter	emmêler	
conquêter	quêter	engréler	
désentêter	requêter	entremêler	
écrêter	reprêter	fêler	
embêter	tempêter	gréler	
enquêter		mêler	

The 22 verbs, which for lack of authority I have been unable to assign to either of the first two classes, are:

baqueter	niqueter	bateler	hôteler
caneter	palette	capeler	ponteler
chiqueter	pelletter	crêtelier	
corneter	planeter	empasteler	
culleter	sauveter	fumeler	
décliqueter	simpleter	fuseler	
haqueter		grappeler	

I have endeavored to give here a complete list of all verbs ending in *-eler* and *-eter*, but it is not my purpose at present to examine the principles of orthography with reference to the last two classes. I will confine myself to those verbs which are unaccented in the infinitive.

Why then is it that among these verbs some double the *l* or *t*, whereas others obtain the same result in pronunciation by accenting the *e*? I find the utmost confusion reigning among grammarians and even academicians as to this question. In fact three of the verbs above-mentioned, which I have on the authority of the Academy grouped in the second class, according to Littré should belong to the first. These verbs are: *claqueter*, *jarreter* and *décolleter*. I have searched in vain for some rule or principle among the most noted French grammarians, and though ready to seize the faintest hint, I have not found one who so much as gave an opinion on the subject, beyond saying that it was very awkward to have no definite rule on the subject.

I subjoin an extract which will show this confusion. In the *Grammaire des Grammaires*, of Girault Duvivier, (edited by P. A. Lemaire, Paris 1863, p. 511-12), we find the following peculiar way of getting out of the difficulty. In treating this question he says:

“En Français un mot ne peut pas être terminé par deux *e* muets de suite. C'est une règle qui ne souffre aucune exception. Mais dans ce cas faut-il toujours doubler la dernière consonne pour rendre le premier de ces deux *e* sonore? ou bien peut-on employer aussi l'accent grave? Nous ne trouvons point à ce sujet de règle fondée sur une base uniforme; il semble que l'usage seul, ait, au hasard, établi des différences. *Ces mots sans doute se présentent rarement, nous pensons, toutefois, qu'il faut s'abstenir d'en faire usage.*”

This last suggestion has at least the merit of being thorough, but the spirit of the present day will not admit of such a conclusion. I could cite numerous other instances of confused ideas on this subject; in fact, take up any grammar you choose, you will find, either that the matter is quietly passed over in silence or that the author says he can give you no fixed rule for your guidance. Indeed it would be hard for him to do so when, as before remarked, two such high authorities as the Academy and M. Littré are at variance as regards certain verbs.

These examples prove clearly the confusion that reigns as to the proper way of conjugating some of these verbs, and it would seem

that no one up to this time had ever taken the trouble to enquire into the origin of this anomaly or tried to find a reason for this difference of orthography. Nothing, therefore, was left to me but to examine closely each verb in its origin and development, and by this means to find out what cause or causes had produced such a result. This examination has led me to the conclusion that it can only be ascribed to the influence of etymology.

These verbs are for the most part derived from the Latin, and at the time when the Academy published the first edition of its dictionary (in 1694), the influence of Latin among the literati was paramount; and at this epoch we find introduced into the language a whole host of new words formed almost without change from the written Latin. This, however, would prove nothing were not my conclusions substantiated by facts the consideration of which will enable the reader to judge whether this opinion is well grounded or not.

1. In the class of verbs of which *appeler* and *jeter* are the types and which double the consonant before mute *e*, I find eighteen derived directly from Latin verbs.¹ In *every* case the Latin verb has a double consonant in the infinitive.

2. On the other hand in the class of verbs such as *celer* and *acheter*, I find eleven derived directly from Latin verbs.² Of these only *one* has two *l*'s in the infinitive, and that is *encasteler*, a term of veterinary science derived from the Low-Latin *incastellare*, and a word not very often employed.

These facts in themselves, I think, are very strong proof that the etymology had a powerful influence on the different forms.

Admitting, then, that this principle accounts for the orthography of 18 verbs in the first class and 11 in the second, let us see now what we can do for the remainder. In the first class we have still 87 verbs to account for. Of these 64 are derived from diminutive forms and 6 are frequentatives, 15 are derived from nouns not

¹ *e. g.*: *appeler* derived from Latin *appellare*

atteler " " *astellare*

chanceler " " *cancellare*

jeter " " *jactare**

*the *c* being assimilated; ex. Ital. *gettare*, etc.

² *e. g.*: *celer* derived from Latin *celare*

geler " " *gelare*

acheter " " *adcaptare**

*the *p* being dropped and forming *acatare*, etc.

diminutives, and two from Keltic verbs. The Latin double-diminutives, as every one knows, were written with two *l*'s, as *auricilla*, *monticellus*. Hence it would follow according to the principle stated above, that verbs derived from these would also double the intermediary consonant in preference to accenting the *e*, where the pronunciation required it. The great number of diminutives contained in this class as compared with the second is, I think, a strong argument for my cause.

Of the 15 verbs derived from nouns, 9 of them have for roots feminine nouns, and 6 only have masculine forms. All the former terminate in a double consonant.

Passing to the second class, besides the 11 verbs already referred to, we find 13 diminutives and 3 frequentatives as against 64 and 6 respectively in the first class, also 4 verbs derived from nouns. Of these last *three* are masculine, and have only one consonant at the end, and *one* is feminine. Of the diminutives 11 are masculine nouns and two are feminine, which would lead us to believe that the tendency was to conjugate verbs derived from feminine nouns or from Latin diminutives as *appeler* and *jeter*, and derivatives of masculine nouns as *acheter* and *celer*.

From these figures, the result of a careful study of each verb, I think I am justified in saying that etymology is the cause which has determined the variations of orthography, and the fact that there are words which are conjugated in opposition to this principle does not in any way affect my argument. In the first place they are comparatively rare, and secondly their presence in the wrong class can be attributed to the confusion which exists among grammarians touching this question, (as shown by the extracts above given,) and which in the case of words for which usage and custom gave no rule, caused authors to employ either orthography as they themselves saw fit.

On the other hand if this was not the principle which guided the orthography it must be the pronunciation, as we cannot accept an empty word, *chance*, as a cause. This must have caused a preference for a double consonant after certain syllables and an accented *e* after others. But a casual glance at these verbs will suffice to show the fallacy of that argument. Why should *acheter*, for instance, have an accented *e*, while *cacheter* (the very same word phonetically) with a *c* prefixed, requires two consonants; or *appeler* take two *l*'s and *agneles* employ an accented *e*? Were we to depend on the pronunciation as our guide we should find it

difficult to distinguish the difference between one orthography and another, as it would take a very fine ear indeed to observe any difference of sound in the last syllable of *j'appelle* and *je bourrèle*, for instance. There is to-day another tendency which M. Littré notices in his dictionary, and which I have often observed personally, and that is to retain the mute *e* in all cases in some verbs and say *e. g. je cach'te, je cach'terai, je bourr'le, je bourr'lerai*, etc., which would add another class to our already complicated list.

I am, therefore, convinced, in the absence of proof positive to the contrary, that etymology is the sole principle which presided at the formation of these two different orthographies. These verbs should, therefore, be classed as follows:

I. All those derived from Latin verbs having *//* or assimilated *#* in the infinitive, or from Latin diminutives terminating in two consonants, or from feminine nouns, should belong to the first class and double the consonant before the mute *e*.

II. Those which are derived from Latin verbs having only one consonant preceding the termination of the infinitive, or from diminutives terminating in one consonant or from masculine nouns, should employ a grave accent before mute *e*.

The carrying out of this measure would involve a slight interchange from one class to another, but would have at least the merit of giving some guide as to which is the correct orthography for us to use, although it would suppose a knowledge of Latin and etymology which all do not possess.

On the other hand, although our philological sentiments could not countenance the overthrow of all principles of etymology and due development of the language, still it would simplify matters very much if the Academy, yielding to the demands of grammarians and others, should ordain that all these verbs be written alike one way or other. The principle which originally presided at the choice of either orthography has been so considerably overlooked already, and in fact so entirely unnoticed, that it would be no great change if it were completely banished; whereas the advantage to the learner, both native and foreign, gained by this increased simplicity would more than compensate for the loss of an obsolete principle.

Having thus, as I believe, satisfactorily disposed of the first two classes, verbs of the third class, (my principle once admitted,) can readily be assigned, according to etymology, to their respective places, as also the 22 verbs which I was not able previously to classify.

It does not enter into my plan to treat of the two remaining classes which, in their conjugation, do not present the same difficulty as those I have endeavored to examine. I will simply state that, in my opinion, the 29 verbs which have an acute accent on the penult in the infinitive are to those which have double *l* or double *t* in the infinitive in the same ratio as the verbs I have grouped in the second class are to those of the first. The study of the principle in these cases is one I should very much like to see taken up, as it would have an important bearing on the question which has occupied me in this paper.

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